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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 003619

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/NGA

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TAGS: [PREL](#), [KU](#), [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: (U) KUWAITI SHI'IS DESCRIBE TRIP TO NAJAF AND KARBALA, OFFER ADVICE

Classified By: ADCM John G. Moran for reasons 1.5 (d)

1. (C) Summary: A group of prominent Kuwaiti Shia businessmen recently briefed the Ambassador on their visit to the Shia spiritual centers of Najaf and Karbala. The group met with Shia leaders who shared their concerns that the security situation in the holy cities had still not been properly addressed. The Shia leaders, who included Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani and Mohammed Bahr Al-Oloum, also gave the Kuwaitis advice to pass on to the USG on how to stabilize the situation in Iraq. End Summary.

2. (C) The Ambassador met with prominent Kuwaiti businessmen Jawad Bukhamseen and Abdul Ilah Marafie on July 18. Also present were two of Bukhamseen's sons, Anwar and Raed, and Poloff (notetaker). Bukhamseen and Marafie had recently returned from a trip which took them into the Shia holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. There, they met with Shia clerics Mohammed Bahr Al-Oloum, Mohammed Baquer Al-Hakim, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, Sayed Mohammed Saeed Al-Hakim and Shaikh Ishaq Al-Fadhli and discussed with them the current situation in Iraq.

#### Increasing Security

3. (C) Bukhamseen said all of the clerics expressed their gratitude to the coalition for its liberation of Iraq, but were deeply troubled that the security situation had not markedly improved since the officially declared end of major combat operations. For example, despite issuing fatwahs calling on his followers not to commit acts of violence against coalition forces and reminding them that they "are not allowed to take revenge," i.e fatwahs aimed at maintaining stability, Grand Ayatollah Sistani has found the security situation so threatening that he has stopped attending Friday prayers. Bukhamseen said the clerics proposed that the provision by the coalition of forces specifically charged with guarding religious shrines and the lives of religious leaders would do much to restore stability to the region.

#### Remove all Ba'athis

4. (C) In addition, the clerics were concerned that coalition forces were installing and/or empowering local officials who were at best, not accountable to the people, or at worst Ba'athi officials from the old Saddam regime. The clerics urged coalition forces to conduct thorough background checks on all officials being installed and to increase the security of the holy cities.

#### Countering Satellite Stations

5. (C) Bukhamseen said Bahr Al-Oloum was distraught at the seeming inability of the coalition to counter Arab satellite channels, although the cleric understands that much has been asked of the coalition in a very short period of time. Bahr Al-Oloum told the visitors he and his colleagues constantly try to reinforce to their followers that the stations are working against their interests as Iraqis, but they are fighting an uphill battle. Bukhamseen suggested to the Ambassador that the USG should offer key Iraqi journalists the opportunity to visit the U.S. This, he said, might be an effective way to garner their goodwill, as well as educate them.

#### Encouraging the return of the Diaspora

6. (C) Both Bukhamseen and Marafie made suggestions about what the USG and the CPA could do to further their goals in Iraq. For example, they said, the goal of growing the economy and encouraging investment in Iraq would be made much easier if exiled Iraqis were given preferential tax treatment to return and invest in the country. In addition to helping grow the economy, this would bring back many Iraqis who have been exposed to Western ideas about justice and democracy, which they said, are bound to rub off.

#### Addressing Psychological Trauma

7. (C) Marafie said it was also important for the CPA to begin addressing the psychological trauma of the Iraqi people

by building memorials to those who had fallen during the Saddam Hussein era. The Ambassador agreed this was a good idea, and suggested that local exhibits featuring names and/or photos of dead and/or missing loved ones would be a good way to go about this task.

Building economic ties through trade shows

18. (C) Bukhamseen, who already has plans to build two hotels in Najaf and Karbala as well as a re-bar factory and a bottling plant in Basra, and has already started distributing boxed juices in Iraq (via his company, ABC), said that the security situation in Iraq was prohibiting even small-scale trade and barter. He proposed that a secure exhibition space be developed near Baghdad, where local Iraqi companies could come to do business with Kuwaiti and American firms. Bukhamseen said he would periodically organize armed convoys to protect shipments of goods to the exhibition area. Bukhamseen said the exhibition areas would serve the dual purposes of supplying the existing huge demand in Iraq, and allowing companies a foothold in the Iraqi market.

Comment

19. (C) Both Marafie and Bukhamseen are very successful Kuwaiti Shia businessmen with strong historical ties to the Shia community of southern Iraq. Marafie's grandfather gilded the dome of the Imam Ali mosque, and built many other mosques in Southern Iraq. They are clearly well connected and not afraid to take risks in Iraq for their own benefit and to create employment for Iraqis. They are exactly the kind of entrepreneurs we should encourage to enter the Iraqi market -- preferably with U.S. partners.

110. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.  
JONES